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DE RUEHGT #1315 2962231
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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6300
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 4976
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 001315

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/21/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [GT](#)
SUBJECT: GOG CELEBRATES 1944 REVOLUTION, LEFTISTS VANDALIZE
CHANCERY

Classified By: Pol/Econ Couns Drew Blakeney for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

11. (U) The Colom Government sponsored a major, public celebration of this year's anniversary of the October 20, 1944 revolution that ousted strongman Jorge Ubico and instituted a reformist, democratic government. Thousands attended. In the past, leftist groups, rather than the GOG, had commemorated the event. The GOG took out full-page newspaper advertisements to announce the official celebration at the National Palace on Guatemala City's central square, aired an official television documentary, and draped huge depictions of revolutionary heroes over the palace's front facade. The GOG's images were in red and black, recalling the colors of revolutionaries in neighboring El Salvador and Nicaragua. The artwork depicted heroic proletarians in a style reminiscent of official Cuban and Soviet art. Argentine, Venezuelan, and Guatemalan revolutionary bands warmed up the crowd with protest music.

12. (U) During the official ceremony in the plaza, the President, Vice President, cabinet, and diplomatic corps, including the Ambassador, were on a small stage with insubstantial barriers and no police to keep away the crowds. A hostile tone was set immediately by labor union protesters shouting insults at the government over megaphones during the national anthem. As President Colom presented the "Order of the Quetzal" to 17 participants in the 1944 revolution, the ceremony was interrupted by chants from members of HIJOS, a radical organization of war orphans. The HIJOS members protested Colom's alleged usurpation of Guatemala's revolutionary tradition (among other complaints). President Colom and the party on the dais were forced to move inside to finish the event. Once inside, Colom asserted to the audience that he did not intend for his to be a revolutionary government, but that he would continue to make changes to do away with the prevailing "system of hunger." Even inside, the ceremony was further disrupted by fireworks and shots fired outside.

13. (SBU) Earlier in the day, leftist groups consisting of unionists, university students, and others paused during their march to the square at the Embassy to spray-paint anti-USG graffiti on the chancery's outer wall and lob bags of red and black paint over the fence. An augmented Guatemalan police force looked on but took no effective action. (Embassy immediately painted over the graffiti following the protest.) The Ambassador protested to the Foreign Minister and Minister of Government that the GOG had failed to fulfill its obligations under the Vienna Convention to protect diplomatic property. They apologized, as did President Colom and Vice President Espada when they encountered the Ambassador in the course of the celebration at the National Palace.

14. (C) Comment: Government security forces performed poorly

in protecting both the dignitaries on stage at the National Palace and the chancery. We will continue to insist that the GOG has an obligation to protect diplomatic property.

15. (C) The unprecedented celebration of the 1944 revolution is characteristic of Colom's habit of cloaking himself in the mantles of Arevalo and Arbenz. At the same time, Colom made no references to the USG-supported coup that overthrew Arbenz. It was also an attempt to demonstrate continuity with the political legacy of Colom's uncle, Manuel Colom Argueta, a popular leftist former Mayor of Guatemala City who was murdered by suspected right-wing death squads in 1979. As external economic factors batter the Guatemalan economy and with violent crime on the rise, Colom's first year in the presidency is short on achievements. Colom may have been seeking some popular support in the symbolism of a popular revolution, but the radical left made it clear that they do not view his government as the successor of Arevalo and Arbenz.

McFarland